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ABSTRACT

The role of community school programs in rural schools is discussed in this paper. Major topics are community school program elements, legislation affecting rural community school programs, indications of need for community education principles, programs to remediate rural school deficiencies, and recommendations for program development. Where research has been carried out, there are indications that dropouts have declined, that social and recreational programs have been strengthened, and that residents have enjoyed greater involvement due to community school programs. Fourteen suggestions for rural school districts interested in establishing a community education program are listed. (PS)

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COMMUNITY SCHOOLS IN RURAL AREAS

by

David H. Dean

Mott Institute for Community Improvement
Michigan State University

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New Mexico State University

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COMMUNITY SCHOOLS IN RURAL AREAS

Introduction

Scratch any group of rural educators and there is likely to be present at least one person who feels that the problems of rural education range all the way from financial difficulties to bunions and cold sores. Look at a similar sized gathering of community school people and someone in the group will probably swear that the community school concept can alleviate the major part, if not all, of those problems. So that this writer's biases--biases based upon extensive examination of the literature in both areas--may be readily apparent, let it be noted that little has been published which disagrees with either the rural education pessimist or the community school optimist. The principles upon which community schools are said to operate appear to provide an ideal platform from which to attack educational problems that abound in rural, as well as urban, areas.

Definitions

Before the problems of rural education and the promises of the community school are examined in detail, it appears that a definition of both identities is in order. A description of rural education is offered for the reader whose main interests lie outside that realm; and the community school is discussed for those who are relatively unfamiliar with that particular concept.

A mid-1950s yearbook published by the National Education Association, Department of Rural Education, simply stated that rural education is "conceived to be the education of children and youth who live in a rural

environment" [Rural Education, 1955: p. 4]. Rather than defining the term, Dawson (1955: p. 217) cited the characteristics of relatively low population density and the preponderance of occupations related to farming and/or the extracting of natural resources from the earth and sea. For statistical purposes, and for little other reason, rural schools (and small schools) are commonly considered to be those which serve an area with a population of less than 2,500. Another noncontroversial (and also nonhelpful) definition of rural education is that part of education which takes place in nonmetropolitan or nonurban regions. For the purpose of this paper, it appears that the best definition of rural education is that which occurs in school systems which have fewer of the advantages inherent in heavily populated trade and manufacturing centers and at the same time fewer of the disadvantages that accrue to such areas.

The term "community school" is often interchanged with "community education," with about the same results that occur when "schooling" and "educating" are transposed. Minzey (1972) differentiated between the two terms by explaining that "community education is the educational concept; community school is the vehicle by which many services of community education are delivered [p. 152]." To further illustrate the relationship between the term "community school" and "community education," Maurice Seay suggested that "a community school...involves an educative process by which the resources of a community are related to the needs and interests of the people" [Henry, 1953: p. 8]. Weaver (1972: p. 154) suggested that the aforementioned process is indeed community education and that the process is designed to meet the educational needs of the individual and society.

Clark (1972) put some muscle on the process skeleton by insisting

that the process includes the following primary functions:

1. A means for putting the ideas, wants and needs of the people back into the educational system that serves them.
2. A means for providing academic, vocational, recreational enrichment and leisure-time educational experiences to community members of all ages.
3. A means for cooperating with other educational agencies serving the community [in working] toward common goals and identifying overlapping of responsibilities and voids in services provided.
4. A means for community members to understand, evaluate and attempt to solve locally basic human problems [p. 2].

With no intention of trying to offer the definitive explanation of community education (for the foregoing definitions are perfectly acceptable), it seems that for the purposes of this paper the following definition is best: Community education insists that the schools belong to the people and ought to be used by the people to provide for their needs and desires.

If one truly subscribes to the philosophy that the schools do indeed belong to the community residents who pay for them (as apart from belonging to the board, the administration, the teaching staff, sometimes even the custodial staff), one must proceed to the next logical step and concur with the assertion that people ought to be able to use the schools to meet their needs and desires. A community school program furnishes an avenue for the school to be used by all community citizens.

Community School Program Elements

The elements of a community school program are as varied as the districts they serve, but there are common elements that are essential to any good rural community school program.

Of primary importance is the need to provide educational opportunities

for everyone. Many rural communities have large percentages of residents who have not attained "terminal" degrees--that is, most have not received an advanced degree; many have not acquired a college diploma; and some have not completed the high school requirements. A functional community education program regards none of its citizens as having dropped out, or for that matter as having become completely educated. In an ideal community school program, opportunities for further study and self-improvement exist both for the person who decided to rest from his formal schooling after grade school completion and for the postdoctoral type. The local school unit may not have the personnel or facilities to meet the educational needs of such a varied group, but the community school program assumes responsibility for surveying the wide range of interests and for bringing, where possible, the necessary resources to bear on the problem. It must be pointed out here that community education considers so-called adult education to be an integral part of a school district's curriculum.

An effective community education program in a rural school district should also have a strong recreation-socialization component. While social and recreational opportunities vary from locale to locale, the characteristic sparsity of population dictates that there will be fewer organized recreation and social activities available in a rural district. The advent of radio, television, and rapid transportation has made urban recreational activities more readily available to the rural residents; the question is whether the activities are appropriate and conducive to satisfying the needs of rural community residents. A community education program assumes the responsibility for assessing the local social needs, for avoiding wasteful duplication of activities, and for planning

recreational programs which will fill voids and/or replace undesirable social outlets. Furthermore, an effective community school program would not only plan social and recreational events, but would work toward full community participation.

Helping to monitor the provision of community services also fits under the aegis of a community school program in a rural district. As one authority emphasized, "the community school does not become all things to all people [but] it attempts to recognize the needs of the community and to act as the coordinator, facilitator or initiator to see that these needs are met" [Minzey, 1972: p. 152]. There is no way for any school to provide all the needed services, but a community education program becomes an ideal clearinghouse for surfacing the needs and for obtaining the required resources. For example, state, county, and university extension services often go unused largely because residents are not aware of their existence. County health services are not always fully utilized by small rural school districts, often because the district has no one specifically responsible for obtaining them. In both the instances cited, personnel directing a community school program would be responsible not only for making the services accessible but also for acquainting the rural populace with the services and encouraging their full use.

Another, and perhaps most important, element of an operational community education program makes provision for increased citizen participation in the school's decision-making process. A community school council provides a forum for planned feedback and feedforward, giving the citizens a voice in school district affairs. One may advance the argument that a rural school board known to most residents on a first-name basis is

sufficiently accessible to community members. However, the normal school board--urban or rural--is generally concerned with financial and personnel proceedings and usually encounters the public only in crisis situations. Hearings on major policy changes are often conducted in kangaroo-court fashion, with no obligation on the part of the board to accept advice.

A strong community education council, on the other hand, provides for continuous interchange of information and ideas from board to citizens and vice versa. Further, the community education council is likely to represent a broader community cross section than is the board of education. The board is less likely to have a poor and/or noninfluential member, and the board definitely will have no teaching personnel. The community education council should by all means include delegates from both these areas. In summation, citizen participation is too important to be left to the discretion of school boards. This participation is planned for and insured by a good community education program.

Community Education Programs in Rural Schools

Whether community school programs exist in a particular district or building depends on the criteria which one chooses to apply. The classic community school model includes a full-time person responsible for "community school" activities--usually defined as those activities that fall outside the "regular" in-school program. Few rural schools have the funds to afford a person whose sole duties lie outside the regular school operation, and as a result relatively few would qualify as community schools if that criteria were applied in isolation. Educators readily admit that employing a director does not necessarily guarantee a functional community school program. It is entirely possible to have a director provide

external portions of a community education program and still violate the vital principle that schools belong to the residents and should be used by them.

If it is possible to have a community school director without an accompanying community school program, it is reasonable to assume that a community school program can exist in the absence of a community school director. There are no better examples of this occurrence than in small rural schools which have performed a community school function for decades without ever having worn the label of "community school." A number of small rural schools have been community centers in every sense of the word--filling social and educational needs as readily (if not as comprehensively) as the most advanced modern community education program. The sense of ownership has been natural and genuine, for very good reason. The residents often had a part in the construction or refurbishing of the building; the teaching was done by community residents; and decisions were often made not by a board but by the entire community. Clapp (1939) used the term community school as early as 1934 in reference to a rural school designed to provide community education services to a Kentucky community. She wrote:

> A school in a rural district has a unique opportunity to function socially....A community school foregoes its separateness. It is influential because it belongs to the people. They share its ideas and ideals and its work. It takes from them as it gives to them. There are no bounds as far as I can see to what it could accomplish in social reconstruction if it had enough wisdom, insight, devotion and energy. It demands all these, for changes in living and learning are not produced by imparting information about different conditions or by gathering statistical data about what exists, but by creating by people, with people, for people [p. 66].

If the feeling of ownership and membership to which Clapp alluded were still prevalent, there would be little need to argue for any type of

organizational or philosophical change. In too many instances, however, such is not the case. The major investment many rural, as well as urban, district residents have in the schools is in the form of an all-too-regular tax bill. Decisions are made by a school board whose composition may or may not be representative of the community. Frequently, the teaching staff resides outside the community. All these negatives tend to set up communication barriers between employees responsible for daily operations and the residents to whom the schools belong.

It would be virtually impossible to quote statistics which accurately reflect the existence of community school programs. Most Michigan schools, particularly those from the rural and small districts, carry the label "community schools" as a part of their title. The presence of the name may or may not be indicative of the type of program they offer--in some cases it means that the schools are <u>in</u> that particular community; in others it means that the schools are <u>of</u> that community and serve it accordingly. A count of districts' community school directors does not serve as a reliable measure; for as noted before, the presence of a director does not guarantee a functional community education program.

Legislation Affecting Rural Community School Programs

Since 1971, there has been a continuing upsurge in state and national interest in the community school concept, resulting in legislation which lends support to the movement. Although the recently enacted laws have not been written to specifically aid rural--rather than urban--school districts, the net result may be just that. The community education acts vary in some respect, but the typical bill provides for the state to fund one-half the salary of a district community school director. Large urban

school districts tend to have more "fat" in their budgets and accordingly can, if they so desire, add community school directors to their staffs with no outside funding. The rural school district budget, on the other hand, typically has few dollars available to hire auxiliary personnel outright. The shared funding provided by the state community education acts can be a determining factor in whether rural districts will employ community school directors.

A stipulation most states place on grants to employ community school directors requires that a citizen's advisory council be formed to guide the district's community education program. In order to meet the criteria for funding, the advisory council's membership is by law required to be representative of the community as a whole. Other aspects of the typical community school bill are geared toward insuring that districts not only receive partial funding for new community education programs, but that they incorporate new organizational and philosophical ideas into their ongoing operations.

Concurrent with the passage of the state community education acts, Senator Frank Church of Idaho and Senator Harrison Williams of New Jersey introduced U.S. Senate Bill No. 2689.[1] The purpose of the act is "to provide recreational, educational and a variety of other community and social services through the establishment of the community school as a center for such activities in cooperation with other community groups." The bill would allow the commissioner of education to make grants to each state educational agency, which in turn would allocate funds to local

[1]At this writing, passage appears imminent.

school districts. For rural schools, the Federal bill would be, assuming its passage, a less attractive source of funding because of the limited number of grants authorized by the bill. Only four pilot project grants are to be allocated to states with populations of less than five million, and only ten grants are to be made available to the most densely populated states. One can readily see that a small rural district (that is, a district likely to have no "grant grabber" on its staff) is less likely to obtain one of the Federal grants authorized by the Church-Williams bill. Federal grants, however, should be viewed as only one source of nonlocal funding. A rural district interested in establishing a community education program should not hesitate to seek revenue from other sources, to be discussed in a later section of this paper.

Indications of Need for Community Education Principles

If a community school program is going to cost more (it may not), if grants have strings attached (they do, but they may be very necessary, very desirable strings), and if funding is difficult to obtain (it need not be), then why should a district consider adopting such a program? In answer to that question, one may point to the literature which indicates that there are a number of problems in rural education which need remediation. Excessively high dropout rates, fewer desirable social and recreational opportunities, curriculum unsuited to preparing for life adjustment, and apathy resulting from lack of opportunity for meaningful involvement in school policy decisions are among the problems of rural schools which community education is designed to affect positively.

Although Cowhig's (1963: p. 34) study of dropout rates in the last decade revealed that rural youngsters dropped out at a rate not much higher

than that for urban youth (28 percent as opposed to 21 percent), the difference gave cause for concern. Cowhig suggested that higher retardation in rural areas and less adequate school facilities might be contributors to the higher rate at which students leave school. Mahlstede and Thomas (1968: p. 157) supported the contention that fewer facilities have a negative effect, for their interviews with dropouts yielded suggestions for curriculum expansion often beyond the capabilities of small rural schools. As Cushman (1967: p. 13) pointed out, the rural school has a most difficult task, for it must prepare youth for the potential of either urban or rural living. Couple the need for broader curricula with rural schools' lower per pupil expenditure [$221 rural average vs. $297 urban average ("Statistics of Rural Schools," 1956)], and one can see that it would be highly unusual if deficiencies did not crop up in the curricula of rural schools.

Rogers and Svenning (1969) noted "that many small schools are located in communities that reflect apathetic attitudes toward the whole educational process" [p.13]. The authors do not argue that this apathy is unique to the rural school, but do intimate that there is a greater need for innovations in the rural school--innovations that are likely to fail because of the apathy of the community's residents.

Fewer social opportunities as well as the problems noted above do not exhaust the list of deficiencies which occur in rural school districts. To argue that such conditions also exist in urban areas simply skirts the obligations of the rural districts to take affirmative action to eliminate the problems.

Community School Programs: Can They Remediate Rural School Deficiencies?

So some rural schools, as well as those in urban areas, have certain deficiencies! Are these problems open to solution, and if so can a community school program lend to that solution? Indeed, indications are that the philosophy and practice of community education can remediate portions of the specific problems listed in foregoing sections of this paper.

The dropout problem comes quickly under attack by functional community school programs. Densley (in Griessman and Densley, 1969) wrote that "school holding power in rural areas will improve when administrators, teachers and counselors work together and strive to involve the parents of potential dropouts" [p. 35]. A community school program provides a vehicle designed to insure parental involvement. It is indeed the obligation of administrators, teachers, and counselors to involve the total community; and a community school program, with its activities for all ages and its representative community education council, can solidify their efforts.

Perhaps the most effective way of solving the dropout problem is to recognize that there is no sacred set period during which schooling must occur. Admitting this, one can easily make the next assumption: citizens are never completely through with their education, and a sixteen year old not engaged in formal studies is to be viewed with no more alarm than a forty-six year old in similar circumstances. The community education philosophy assumes that all community residents have educational needs and that it is the school's obligation to satisfy the needs wherever possible. It also assumes that these needs may be felt at different ages and should be dealt with at that time. It is not the purpose of this writer to argue that community education believes that it is alright for school-aged

youngsters to drop out of school. Rather, the purpose is to show that a community school can erase the stigma of being a dropout by making it so easy and natural to drop back in because the entire community is engaged in "schooling."

The relative lack of social and recreational opportunities is the rural school deficiency most obviously and easily remedied by a community school program. As a matter of fact, many leaders in community education feel that social activities have been over emphasized to the point of hindering the movement's development into a more comprehensive program for solving community problems. Be this as it may, it seems that one of the most valuable contributions to be made to a rural community is to reestablish the school as a social center; to staff that center with a person (community school director) responsible for its maintenance; and to provide activities which will attract community residents. Unless a program does these things, among others, it should not be labeled a community school program. Space will not permit listing all possible community school social activities, but a partial list gathered from the literature may be helpful: daycamps, service clubs, roller skating, bachelors' clubs, art enrichment, spelling clubs, volleyball, basketball, swimming, road races, teen clubs, mathematics clubs, tutoring programs, cake decorating, senior citizens' clubs, men's clubs, women's clubs, sewing classes, furniture refinishing, study groups, and so forth. The community school does not try to replace the church, the home, the peer group, the natural recreational outlets, or the neighborhood social gathering. It merely seeks to improve the quality of existing opportunities, to fill remaining voids, and to coordinate activities so that wasteful duplication can be reduced.

If helping to provide rural areas with social and recreational opportunities is the most easily accomplished goal of a community school program, perhaps the most difficult goal is to provide a suitable curriculum. There are at least three ways that a community school program can have a positive effect on curriculum: (1) the community education council, by being broadly representative of the community, can make the entire community's desires known regarding curriculum offerings; (2) the community school program itself can enrich the curriculum; and (3) citizens who have a voice in curriculum design through the community education council will be more likely to underwrite additional expenditures for curriculum improvement. The fond notion that only "professionals" can make curriculum decisions is one which must be given up by educators who work for community school owners. This is not to say that laymen alone will make the decisions but only that the realities of laymen's needs and desires will be taken into consideration before continuing to offer curricula which equip rural youngsters neither for the city nor for the farm.

A functional community education program is especially well equipped to eliminate the apathy of rural (or urban) residents toward their school programs. The dictionary defines the word "apathy" as an absence of feeling, but it does not explain the origin of the emotion. This writer would like to speculate that apathy pertaining to school situations is probably a result of never having been meaningfully involved. How can one spend 8 to 12 to 16 (or more) years attending school, paying school taxes, electing school boards, cheering school teams, and then supplying children to the schools and not be meaningfully involved? Simply because most of one's relationships with the schools are passive--things are done

to and for the citizen, not by and with him. A resident receives schooling, receives tax bills, receives expenditure accountings, receives board rulings, receives pupil progress reports, receives the school calendar. The tenure of this constant reception need be only a short one until the average citizen becomes apathetic. His involvement is meaningless because the events and changes and decisions occur with or without him or his approval. And for the increasing number of residents who have no children, the school offers even less meaningful involvement.

A community education program attempts to remedy community apathy in two distinct ways: (1) attempts are made to convince the present policy makers that decisions which affect lives should be made by those whose lives are affected and (2) attempts are made to establish a working community education council which will serve as a forum for the voices of all community members.

Although it would not be appropriate to offer data in support of community education claims, statistics regarding the success or failure of rural community school programs are apparently not in existence at this writing. The lowered dropout rate, increased social opportunities, and higher level involvement cited by Clancy, (undated: p. 1) are indications that community school programs will alleviate deficiencies in urban schools. However, VanVoorhees (1972) stated,

> There is currently little research that either supports or denies the effectiveness of community education. Proponents have begun to gather information, but by and large what we have so far are reports of increased attendance, touching stories about individual success, and opinion--lots of opinion. Several decades after its birth as an educational movement, community education is still supported not by facts but by the logic of the process [p. 203].

Rogers (1973) indicated that this paucity of research information may be coming quickly to an end. He refused to speculate in terms of hard data but made reference to the Sevier County, Utah, rural school program as being one which is apparently accomplishing and recording many of its stated aims. There are a number of other successful rural community education programs operational in Michigan, Utah, and other states; but as VanVoorhees said, "Community education practitioners are typically young, action-oriented and suspicious of research and researchers" [1972: p. 203]. If these projects have been formally researched, the data have not been made available in published form.

Recommendations for Program Development

The inclination to implement programs rather than research them to death has been the hallmark of community educators. The firmest push, though not necessarily the first, to spread community education throughout the land was given by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation of Flint, Michigan. As noted before, many rural schools were, by their very method of operation, the country's first community schools. It was, however, left to two city dwellers--Frank Manley and C. S. Mott of Flint--to initiate in 1935 a program that would engulf the land in the community education movement. In beginning Flint's first community school nearly four decades ago, it may be that these two urban residents provided the most feasible avenue for rural schools to adopt--or readopt if you please--the community school concept.

Community education centers supported by the Mott Foundation have been established at 15 universities across the United States to aid rural and urban school districts in the implementation of community education programs.

A number of cooperating centers have grown out of the 15 dissemination centers and are now operating from universities to make community education information even more readily available to interested districts. Of particular interest to rural districts is the fact that cash grants to partially fund initial stages of the program are available to districts in some instances. A contact with the nearest dissemination center will result in immediate help from that center or in referral to a closer cooperating center. Following is a list of the centers' locations and directors:

Alma College
Alma, Michigan
Mr. K. Hugh Rohrer, Director

Arizona State University
Tempe, Arizona
Dr. Thomas Mayhew, Director

Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana
Dr. Ethan Janove, Director

Brigham Young University
Provo, Utah
Dr. Israel C. Heaton, Director

University of Connecticut
Storrs, Connecticut
Dr. Roland Frank, Director

Eastern Michigan University
Ypsilanti, Michigan
Dr. Jack Minzey, Director

Florida Atlantic University
Boca Raton, Florida
Dr. Robert Cheek, Director

Northern Michigan University
Marquette, Michigan
Mr. John Garber, Director

California State University-San Jose
San Jose, California
Dr. Tony S. Carrillo, Director

Texas A&M University
College Station, Texas
Dr. Robert Berridge, Director

University of Alabama
Birmingham, Alabama
Dr. Delbert H. Long, Director

University of Missouri
St. Louis, Missouri
Dr. Everette Nance, Director

University of Oregon
Eugene, Oregon
Mr. Larry L. Horyna, Director

University of Virginia
Charlottesville, Virginia
Dr. Larry Decker, Director

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
Dr. Gerald C. Martin, Director

Rural school districts interested in establishing a community education program will find useful the suggestions made by Carrillo and Heaton (1972:

p. 165). Although the suggestions are listed in numerical order, they represent checkpoints only. The order of their completion may be non-sequential, but each step should be carried out. In the event a step is not needed, it should be omitted by design rather than by neglect. One should bear in mind that these suggestions take into consideration that the impetus to begin a community education program may well come from a segment of the community not directly connected with the schools. Carrillo and Heaton suggest the following:

1. Request information and/or assistance from an existing center for community education development (from the list above).

2. Schedule a meeting involving a cross-section of interested school district personnel, community representatives, and community agency representatives to consider the application of community education to community life. (A steering committee might grow from such a meeting.)

3. Schedule a meeting with the appropriate school district central administration personnel, and school principals. (Staff members of community education development centers are available as capable resource people.)

4. Schedule an exploratory meeting with the appropriate school district board of trustees.

5. The development steering committee may wish to send a representative group to visit an existing community school. (This action may well precede the two most recent steps.)

6. Schedule staff meetings in schools where principals have indicated an eagerness to provide leadership in the establishment of pilot community schools. (In the case of small rural districts, the "pilot" project may involve the entire district.)

7. Schedule meetings with community residents. (Hopefully, a significant portion of the rural community has been involved in preliminary stages of development.)

8. The board of education and/or supportive agencies formally adopt the concept of community education and decide to establish a community school.

9. Select a community education coordinator. (In a rural district, this may be a person who is already wearing another hat. One individual, however, should be delegated the responsibility of leading the community school program development.)

10. Release the appointed community education coordinator for appropriate training, if he has had none. (A large part of this training can be accomplished at the regional center for community education dissemination or through an internship at a functioning community school. Additional in-depth training is available, at no cost, through the National Center for Community Education in Flint, Michigan.)

11. Implement the initial phases of the community school program.

12. Establish a community advisory council. (The fact that most private, state, and Federal grants require the council as a funding prerequisite attests to the vital importance of the advisory council.)

13. Initiate a detailed study of the wants and needs of the community. (There is every likelihood that such a survey may already have been made, perhaps informally. The decision to begin a community school program may well be the result of the study.)

14. Establish a plan of evaluation. (Community education assumes that any education plan--even a community school program--should be revamped if

it does not meet the needs of all community residents. Only a thorough, on-going evaluation plan can provide this information.)

Funds for operating a community education program in a rural district can come from several sources. "Seed" money to implement the program may come from private foundations. The Mott, Whirlpool, Besser, Danforth, Ford, Rockefeller, Sears, Meyer, and Corning foundations have made contributions to different phases of community education, according to Pappadakis and Totten (1972: p. 192). Federal grants are made through the U.S. Office of Education to support pilot projects. States which have adopted community education legislation will pay up to one-half the cost of a community school director's salary. Churches, farm bureaus, and industries located within a rural community are possible sources. Of course, the most reliable funding source is the school district's operating budget. Pappadakis and Totten (1972: p. 192) estimated that an increase of six to eight percent is needed to convert to a full-scale community school program. Since such an increase would result in a tax hike, it is imperative that the community voters be thoroughly apprised of the potential that a community education program offers in solving the community's educational problems.

Summary

Rural schools have needs which community education programs seem especially well equipped to meet. Although little formal research has been done to substantiate or discredit such claims, positive indicators are so strong that Federal legislation has been introduced; and some states have adopted legislation to support community schools. Where research has been carried out, there are indications that dropouts have declined, that

social and recreational programs have been strengthened, and that the residents have enjoyed greater involvement. Funds to finance implementation of community school programs are available from a variety of local and outside sources. All people even remotely connected with rural education have an obligation to ask themselves if community education might supply solutions to problems that are all too frequently associated with rural school districts.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David H. Dean is the Assistant Director of the Mott Institute for Community Improvement at Michigan State University. In this position, he is involved in implementing community education practices in the Michigan public schools. His other duties range from instructing in undergraduate basic courses to developing alternative graduate degree programs. Previous to this experience, Dr. Dean taught in an elementary school and served as an assistant principal. During his undergraduate days and before entering a program working for an advanced degree in education, he was employed as a proofreader on a daily newspaper, as a clerk for a cotton-seed oil company, and as an instrument technician for a natural gas company.